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SUBJECT: EUROPEANS STEP UP WHA REGIONAL CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Europeans are lavishing greater attention on Costa Rica and other regional players with a view to shaping Latin America's engagement at the December 2009 Copenhagen negotiations on climate change. Through a Feb. 23-24 visit, France's climate envoy signed a joint statement with Costa Rica's environment minister to stress French support for the GOCR's "National Climate Change Strategy." In addition, as the UK and other EU members look for Costa Rica to play an influential role during the region's run-up to Copenhagen, they have stepped up their climate engagement to "help Latin America go to Copenhagen well prepared." Regardless of any vehicle the USG might choose, such as Central America's emerging bid for a new "CONCAUSA III" process with the U.S. (septel), the EU has already started the race for regional influence on climate. END SUMMARY.

France & Costa Rica Agree to Climate Cooperation

¶2. (U) Brice Lalonde, France's chief climate change negotiator, visited Costa Rica Feb. 23-24, meeting with Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, Environment Minister Roberto Dobles, other government officials and private sector representatives. On Feb. 24, Lalonde and Dobles signed a joint statement in which France committed to supporting Costa Rica's implementation of its "Peace with Nature" initiative and its "National Climate Change Strategy," both of which aim to make Costa Rica carbon neutral by 2021.

¶3. (U) Touting Costa Rica as an "environmental legend for biodiversity in the world," Lalonde said that Costa Rica would give France advice on natural resource management. The agreement also reportedly provides for French assistance to Costa Rica on water, waste management, public transportation, energy efficiency, and geothermal development. Looking ahead to the December 2009 climate negotiations in Copenhagen, Dobles suggested that Costa Rica could play a "catalytic role" in helping to bridge the "enormous

differences" between the different blocs heading into the negotiations.

Other EU Players Boost Climate Focus in the Region

¶4. (SBU) On Feb. 28, British Ambassador to Costa Rica, Tom Kennedy, told REO that climate change is the UK's key priority for Latin America. He said that the UK has contributed USD 1 million to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America & the Caribbean (ECLAC) for preparation of "mini Stern reports" addressing the economic aspects of climate change for Mexico, Central America, and South America. (Note: Kennedy credited the UK's 2006 "Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change" as having a "pivotal impact on the international climate debate." End note.) Kennedy added that UK embassies in the region, led by a nine-person team in their Mexico City embassy, are contributing to a regional climate change study. In addition, he said that the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) has a campaign underway to get military authorities engaged on climate change issues. They have begun by working to influence "military opinion leaders" in Mexico, Colombia, and Guatemala.

¶5. (SBU) Kennedy noted that several EU members look for Costa Rica to play an influential role with other Latin Americans during the run-up to Copenhagen and that several EU members aim to help Latin America go to Copenhagen "well prepared." Noting the French envoy's Feb. 23-24 visit, Kennedy suggested that France views Costa Rica as a "key entry point to the G77." Along with the UK, he said that Germany and Spain appear to have stepped up their support for Costa Rica's implementation of its National Climate Change Strategy. Kennedy reasoned that Costa Rica's many years on the international stage, its various "centers of excellence" on environment, a strong NGO community, and the GOCR's "Peace With Nature" commitment to carbon neutrality put Costa Rica at the forefront of the region on climate. He said that Costa Rica had hoped to host a regional meeting on climate change this month, but was preempted by an ECLAC climate meeting set for March 9 in Santiago. Costa Rica may look to host a follow-on meeting mid-September 2009 which, Kennedy averred, could include EU invitees.

¶6. (SBU) Kennedy continued, "everyone has noticed what President Obama is saying and doing on climate change." He was gratified to learn of Secretary Clinton's & Special Envoy Todd Stern's recent visit to China, noting that "it would be a disaster for all of us if we don't come out of Copenhagen without the U.S. and China together on climate."

COMMENT: "Game On" for Regional Influence on Climate

¶7. (SBU) As evidenced by the French climate envoy's recent visit and increased attention that other Europeans are lavishing on the region on climate, the EU hopes to use its influence with Costa Rica and other regional "opinion leaders" such as Mexico in shaping Latin America's and the G77's engagement at Copenhagen. In addition to U.S. engagement with the region's heavy hitters (e.g., Brazil and Mexico), the emerging Central American hope of strengthening climate ties with the U.S. through a new "CONCAUSA III" process (septel) could offer a vehicle to broaden the U.S. profile and influence in Central America and the Caribbean. Regardless of the vehicle we choose, the EU has already started the race for regional influence. END COMMENT.

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